SANSKRIT LEARNING IN MITHILĀ UNDER THE KHAṆḌAVALĀ DYNASTY

By

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I

Mithilā has been the centre of Sanskrit learning since times immemorial and no other part of India can boast of an unbroken tradition of scholarship from the hoary age of the Vedas, down to the present time. Besides *Nyāya*, which has been the speciality of this place, other branches of Sanskrit literature were also cultivated and developed and in the domain of *Dharmaśāstra* her contributions have been singularly remarkable. "From the days of the *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* to the modern times the land of Mithilā has produced writers whose names are illustrious ."[1]

The rule of the Khaṇḍavalā dynasty (c. 1556 A. D. onwards) was really the golden age of Sanskrit learning in Mithilā. Like the Karṇāṭas and the Oinavāras,[2] the scholar-kings of this line generously patronised learning and art in their star-studded courts. Mm. Maheśa Ṭhākura, the founder of the dynasty was himself one of the brightest literary gems that illumined the period. Well versed in the art of archery and music, he was a scholar *par excellence* and is credited with having written a history of Akbar's reign in poetic Sanskrit, the original copy of which is now preserved in the India Office, London.[3] His other celebrated works are *Āloka-pradīpa*, a commentary on Pakṣadhara Miśra's *Nyāyāloka*, *Dāyasāra*, *Tithitattva-cintāmaṇi*, *Aticārādi-nirṇaya* and *Darpaṇa*, a commentary on

1. P. V. Kane, History of Dharmashāstra, Vol. I, p. 363; also see vols. II-III for ancient & mediaeval periods. For further details see, Thakur, History of Mithilā, pp. 86-94, 98-105, 375-82; M. M. Chakravarti; "Mithilā's contributions to Smriti and Navya-Nyāya" in JASB, 1915 (N.S.); H. D. Sharma, "Some unknown Sanskrit poets of Mithilā" in Jha Comm. Vol, pp. 359ff.
2. Thakur, op. cit, chaps. V-VI.
3. Smith, Akbar, (foxford, 1917), p. 486. The MS. preserved appears to have been written by one Mahesha Thākura about the year 1650 But it is probable that the said manuscript is only a copy of the original written during the life time of Akbar. Mahārāja Remeshvara Simha, brought a photograph of this manuscript at the cost of seven thousand rupees. This photostat copy is now preserved in the Raj Library, Darbhanga in a very good condition.

Gaṅgeśa Upādhyāya's *Nyāya-cintāmaṇi*. He is also said to have met his great contemporary, the celebrated saint-poet, Tulasīdāsa in Kāśī or Banaras.

His greatest contribution to the cause of Sanskrit learning was, however, the establishment of the famous institution of *Dhautavastra-parīkṣā* in Mithilā. It was a compulsory system of examination which the Paṇḍitas of Mithilā had to get through, to get due recognition of their euridite scholarship and learning at the royal court. The practice was to inform those willing to take the examination in any branch of Sanskrit learning, and they were duly examined by the celebrated scholars of the land and declared to have passed the examination in different branches. The successful scholars were then honoured in order of merit. The Naiyāyikas were honoured with a pair of red *dhotī* and the Vaidikas, the Vaiyākaraṇas and others with a pair of yellow *dhotī*.[4] Scholars coming from outside Mithilā also took part in these examinations to qualify themselves for the royal honour. The scholars, thus honoured, were invariably invited by the Mahārājas on the occasion of the *upanayana*, marriage and *śrāddha* ceremonies and given handsome presents. These examinations took place only when such occasions arose. The institution, a unique one, had been zealously maintained and patronised till recent times.

This official examination-system of the Darbhanga Raj popularly known as the *Dhauta-parīkṣā* of which a syllabus was published under the supervision of the Late Dr. Ganganatha Jha, was based on the old Maithila system of *śalākā-parikṣā*[5] where the candidate was allowed even to have his books by his side when the experts took his *viva-voce*. The old system of taking *ṣaḍayantra*[6] was, however, no longer current. In this system the scholar was even required to present himself for examination by the public. The scholar, who would to take *ṣaḍayantra* could be asked any question on any topic, the people liked to. From what we know of

4. It is said that apart from the scholars, even thieves who qualified through Examinations—both theoretical and practical—in the art of theft were honoured with black dhotis. Panjikāras, Bhātas (ballad-singers) etc. were also honoured if they passed such examinations in their respective subjects. That of all the persons, the theives were also honoured in this fasion, sounds rather funny. In mediaeval times, hovever, such idiosyncratic customs were often practised irrespective of their learning on the morale of the society. (Also see P. Jhā, Mithilā-tattvavimarsha, p.14).

5. Vidyābhusana, History of Indian Logic, p. 522 fn. 1; Gopinātha Kavirāja in Sarasvati Bhavan studies, Vol. IV, p. 62; Thakur, op. cit. pp. 379-80.

6. Cf. G. N. Jhā, Kavi-rahasya; Jayaswal, Introduction to Mithilā MSS Catalogue, Vol. II; R. Jhā, Proc. Twelfth All India Oriental Conference, Vol. I, pt. ii, pp. 310, 325.

the last person who is known to have taken it, it appears that it was a sort of intelligence or general knowledge test by the public at large, for it is said that the celebrated scholar, Mm. Gokulanātha Upādhyāya was asked to satisfy his questioners even as to the taste of night-soil. Similarly the institutions of Upādhyāyas, Mahopādhyāyas, and Mahāmahopādhyāyas as graded degrees of seniority among Professors are now extinct.

Maheśa Ṭhākura also wrote in Maithilī and his *Gaṅgā-stuti* is still very popular in Mithilā.[7]

The family of Maheśa Ṭhākura was a family of celebrated scholars and philosophers. His elder brothers Mm. Tegha Ṭhākura, Mm. Megha Ṭhākura and Mm. Dāmodara Ṭhākura were also great scholars in their own rights. Megha Ṭhākura was a disciple of Pakṣadhara Miśra II. He wrote the famous book, *Jalada*, a commentary on Vardhamāna's *Līlāvatī-prakāśa* which is a commentary on Gaṅgeśa Upādhyāya's *Makaranda* which again is a commentary on Udayanācārya's *Kusumāñjali* or *Kiraṇāvalī*. Mm. Dāmodara was well versed in *Nyāya*, *Darśana* and *Karmakāṇḍa* (*Smṛti*) and composed several works of eminence : *Viveka-dīpaka*, *Ṣaḍāśa-mahādana-paddhati,* and *Divya-dīpikā*. He was the court-Paṇḍita of Mahārāja Saṁgrāma Siṁha of Bastara in Central Provinces (Madhya Pradeśa). Besides these, his (Maheśa Ṭhākura's) two sons—Mm. Gopāla Ṭhākura and Acyuta Ṭhākura—were also great scholars of the time. The latter wrote *Vyākhyā-pradīpa*,[8] a commentary on *Amarakośa*.

Another celebrated scholar of the age was Mm. Raghudeva Miśra, son of Vīreśvara Miśra by his wife Kumudinī Devī, sister of Acyuta Ṭhākura. Besides being a great Naiyāyika, he was also an excellent poet and was honoured with the title of *Sarasvatī* in recognition of his marvellous poetic genius by Emperor Shahjahan who also gave him some land-grants in the Purnea district where he settled down in the village of Jagaili or Yajñapattī.[9] It was by his order that Mm. Paraśurāma Jhā copied Vācaspati Mishra's *Śuddhi-cintāmaṇi*, *Vyavahāra-cintāmaṇi*[10] and *Dvaita-nirṇaya*.

7. Cf. the following lines: "गंगे अयलहुँ तोहर समाज । आब की करत यमराज ।। (For full version, see P. Jhā, op. cit. p. 16.

8. Cf. the biginning verse :

व्याकरणकिरण जालैरच्युतमध्याह्नमार्त्तण्डः
अपनीयकुमति तिमिरं जगदरविन्दं विनोदयति ।।

9. For the interesting event relating to the acquisition of the said village by Mm. Raghudeva, see M. Jhā, Mithilā-bhāsāmaya-Itihāsa, pp. 139-47.

10. Cf. the colophon towards the end : "यज्ञपल्लीग्रामे महामहोपाध्याय श्रीरघुदेवसरस्वतीनामाज्ञया श्री पर्शुरामशर्मणालिखिमिदं पुस्तकम्" ।

Mm. Hemāṅgada Ṭhākura, son of Mm. Gopāla Ṭhākura was an unrivalled astrologer of the age. His *Rāhu-parāga-pañjī*[11] is still studied and honoured by the scholars all over the country. His sons and grandsons were also great scholars. Mm. Śubhaṅkara Ṭhākura wrote *Tithi-nirṇaya* and *Śrīhastamuktāvalī*. The last work is now rare.

Rājā Sundara Ṭhākura was a generous patron of scholars by whose order Mm. Kavivara Rāmadāsa had written the famous *Ānanda-vijaya-nāṭikā* in praise of his master and patron. The book was later published by Mahārāja Rameśvara Siṁha.[12]

Narapati Ṭhākura, the younger brother of Rājā Mahīnātha Ṭhākura was a great scholar of Sanskrit who also composed poems in Maithilī.[13] It was by his order that the celebrated Locana Kavi wrote his famous *Rāg ı-taraṅgiṇī*[14] and *Naiṣadha-kāvyam.*[15] The famous *Tirahuti gīta* and *rāga* were composed and popularised by Locana and Narapati during the latter's time which is still the most popular *rāga* in Mithilā. In Rāghava Siṁha's time flourished Kṛṣṇa Kavi who has described the battle of Ladārīghāṭa in his poems. Kavi Nārāyaṇa wrote a *Virudāv ıli* in his praise and also composed the Madhuravāṇīśvara temple inscription.[16] Mm. Narapati Jhā, grandson of Mm. Paraśurāma was yet another court Paṇḍita who composed *Prabodha-candrodaya-naṭaka* (Śaka 1625), *Śuddhi-vivek ı* (śaka 1630), *Haṁsadūta* (saka 1634), *Gopīvallabha* and *Rāgh v ı kirtti-ś ıtak ı*.

This was also the age of Paṇḍitarāja Gokulanātha Upādhyāya (of village Mangarauni in Madhubani sub-division), the most celebrated scholar of the age. He wrote his famous book, *Kuṇḍa-kadambarī* after the name of his daughter who died at an early age. Like Maheśa Ṭhākura, his was also a family of unrivalled scholars who illumined the age by their sparkling geneus in all fields of Sanskrit literature. His son, Mm.

11 Cf. the begining verse : "खण्डवलाकुलतरणेर्गोपालादापयं गौरी। हेमांगदः सतनुते पंजी (:) राहूपरागस्य।" For his miraculous astrological feats said to have been performed before Akbar which is also supported by local tradition, see M. Jha, op. cit, pp. 92-95.

12. For his Maithili poems, see M. Jhā, op, cit, pp. 156-57.

13. Published by Raj Press, Darbhanga.

14. Edited by Baladeva Misra, Raj Press, Darbhanga.

15 Palm-leaf MṢ. preserved in the Rāj Library, Darbhanga, written in Saka 1603 in village Raiyāma, district, Darbhanga.

16. .... नारायणेन कविना पद्यान्येतानि निर्ममिरे........" (R. K. Chaudhary, Select Inscription of Bihar, pp. 127-29.).

Raghunātha, the latter's son Mm. Bhavānīdatta and their sons and grandsons were the undisputed scholars of the time.

Gokulanātha was the disciple of the great Umāpati Upādhyāya of village Koilakha. Gokulanātha had equal command over *Darśana*, *Vyākaraṇa*, *Sāhitya* and *Jyotiṣa*. His works include *Amṛtodaya*. *Ekāvalī-chandograntha*, *Kādambarī-kīrtti-śloka*, *Kādambarī-pradīpa* (Commentary on *Dvaita-nirṇaya*), *Kādambarī-praśnottaramālā*, *Kāvya-prakāśa-ṭīkā*, *Kuṇḍa-kādambarī*, *Kuśumāñjali-ṭippaṇa*, *Raśmi-cakra* (Commentary on *Cintāmaṇi*), *Dikkāla-nirūpaṇa*, *Dīdhita-Vidyota*, *Padakāvya-ratnākara*, *Māsa-mīmaṁsā*, *Mithyātattva-nirvacan*, *Śiva-stuti*, *Khaṇḍava-Kuṭhāra*, *Āloka-ṭippaṇi*, *Ādhārādheya-bhavatattva-parīkṣā*, *Muktivāda-vicāra*, *Viśiṣṭa-vaiśiṣya-bodha*, *Tarka-tattva*, *Prabodha-Kādambarī*, *Lāghava-gaurava-rahasya* etc. In other words, he wrote on almost all the branches of literature and science and all that he touched glittered like gold.

His cousin Madana Upādhyāya and others were simply great by virtue of their euridite learning and scholarship. His another cousin Giridhara Upādhyāya's son Dhīrendra Upādhyāya had also performed *Rajata-tulādāna*, like the celebrated Caṇḍeśvara Ṭhākura who had performed *svarṇa-tulādāna*.[17]

In the time of Rāghava Siṁha, Kalyāṇa Jhā of village Ujāna composed *Sivapraśasti-paddhati* according to which the Rāghaveśvara Śiva was installed, and Mm. Harihara Jhā wrote *Bhartṛharinirveda-nāṭaka*, *Subhāṣitāvalī* or *Harihara-Subhaṣita* and, *Prabhavati-pariṇaya*.

Mahārāja Narendra Siṁha was also a great patron of scholars whom he gave lavish grants for their euridite learning. It is said that, for hearing the *Mahabharata*, he gave in *dakṣiṇa* a village, named Brahmapurā to Paṇḍita Vāgīśa in śaka 1647[18] and village Bhadulī in śaka 1664[19] in *dākṣiṇa* for hearing the *Harivaṁśa* to Paṇḍita Vāgīśa again. Both the villages belonged to Paragana Jaraila in the district of Darbhanga.

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17. Thakur, op. cit., p. 281.

18. JBRS. XL. pp. 355-56. Cf. the following uerse of the village-grant made bv Narendra Simha .

"श्रीमद्धीरनरेन्द्रसिंह नृपतिर्भूमी महेन्द्रोपम:
श्रीवागीश बुधाद्वचोजित सुधाच्छुत्वा महाभारतम्"

19. Ibid. p. 356. Cf. the following nerse.

' शाकेस्कन्दमुखर्त्तुभूप गणिते संवत्सरे माधवे, राकायामवनीपरञ्जितपद: प्रौढ़प्रतापानल:
श्रीमद्धीर नरेन्द्रसिंह नृपतिर्दीनानुकम्पापरो, वागीशाख्यमहीसुराय कृतिने श्रद्धवतामगुणी: ।।''

In the time of Rājā Pratāpa Simha, land, sometimes villages came to be generously granted to deserving scholars which gave rise to some of the unique institutions such as *Brahmottara*, *Śivottara*, *Devottara* etc. The great Vaiyākaraṇa Viṣṇudatta Jhā got the village of Simrā from Pratāpa Simha, in recognition of his vast learning which is recorded in a grant.[20] The grant of village Charauta to Raghunātha Dāsa and Jayakṛṣṇa Dāsa by Pratāpa Simha and Narendra Simha ; donation of ten *bīghās* of land to Vaidika Jīvanātha Śarmā on the occasion of the foundation-ceremony of the Bhagavatīśva Śiva temple near Jhanjharpur (which is recorded in a grant[21]) and many other similar grants by their successors are characteristic of these institutions which had been maintained till recently.

Mahārāja Chatra Simha patronised the famous Naiyāyika Ratnapāṇi Jhā, the grand-father of the late Mm. Baccā Jhā ; Bholā Nātha Jhā, the grand-father of the late Mm. Parmeśvara Jhā and his (Bholānātha Jhā's) cousin, *Vaiyakaraṇa* Śambhūnātha Jhā. Mahātmā Rohiṇidatta (Jhā) Gosāin lived during this time at village Tarauni (Darbhanga district) where Chatra Simha is said to have met him and paid his homage. *Vaiyakāraṇ -Tāntrika* Rāghava Jhā and Candradatta Jhā and others also flourished during his time.[22]

In Rudra Simha's time Devakīnandana Ṭhākura wrote *Lauhamudrādharaṇapāddhati* by his order.

Mahārāja Maheśvara Simha patronised a host of scholars including Mm. Kanhāi Jhā, the celebrated *Naiyāyika* Babujana Jhā and the famous *Jyotiṣīs* Nandi Jhā and Mukheśvara Jhā. The latter wrote *Pūjā-paṭala* by his order. Maheśvara Simha himself was well versed in music and was recognised as an authority at that. He extended his patronage to the celebrated musicians of the age, who came from different parts of the country and thronged his court.

His younger brother, Gopīśvara Simha was a poet of the first order. His *Śrī-Gopīśvara-vinoda*, written in praise of Radhā and lord Kṛṣṇa is well known. It was by his order that several books *eg.*, *Pūjā pañkaja-bhāskra* by Pyāre Jhā; *Nitya kṛtyāvarṇava* by the great Paṇḍita Dhanurdhara Jhā (of village Ṭaṭuār in Darbhanga) and *Gayā-paddhati* were composed. It was again by his order that the available books and manuscripts on *Kālikā-Purāṇa* were collected, edited, printed and distributed amongst scholars.

20. For the grant See P. Jha, op cit., pp. 52-53.

21. Ibid. pp. 59-60,

22. Ibid. pp. 73-74.

The age of Lakṣmīśvara Siṁha was an age of intense literary fervour. The grand-old *Naiyāyikas* of Mithilā, Mm. Kanhai Jhā and Babujana Jhā lived in his court. Besides them, a host of scholars, for instance, Hāli Jhā (*Vaiyākaraṇa*), Viśvanātha Jhā (*Naiyāyika*), Mm. Citradhara Miśra (*Mīmāṁsaka-Śiromaṇi*), Harṣanātha Jhā (*Vaiyākaraṇa*), the celebrated scholar-poets Candra (Candā) Jhā and Kedāranatha Jhā, Śrikṛṣṇa Miśra, Kedāra Bhaṭṭācarya (of Bengal) and Mm. Śiva Kumāra Miśra and Kiśore Pāṭhaka (both of Banaras) illumined the age by the dazzling sparks of their genius in different branches of Sanskrit learning.

The most remarkable literary feature of his time was the regular conference of scholars every week in which celebrated scholars from different parts of the country participated and held disputations over various problems relating to different branches of Sanskrit learning. They were duly honoured and rewarded for their scholarship. His court, so to say, presented the brilliant spectacle of the erstwhile glory of the Mithilā University which attracted scholars from the remote corners of the country during the time of the great Karṇāṭas and the Oinavāras.[23] Besides scholars, his court also attracted celebrated musicians and wrestlers from all over the country, and Hindu and Muslim artists were accorded equal treatment and honour. In order to promote Sanskrit learning he also established many *pāṭhaśālās* (*catuṣpāthīs*) and gave generous help and scholarship to meritorious students for higher studies in Banaras and other centres of Sanskrit learning.

Like his elder brother, Mahārāja Rameśvara Siṁha (father of the late Mahārājadhirāja Kāmeśvara Siṁha, the last scion of this illustrious dynasty) was also a gteat patron of learning and art. His donation of five lacs of rupees to the Banaras Hindu University and of the palatial Darbhanga building to the Calcutta University are just a few instances in point. Almost all the celebrated scholars of the time, eg, Mm. Bālakṛṣṇa Miśra (*Naiyāyika*), Khuddi Jhā, Muktinātha Miśra, Ravinātha Jhā, Sundaralāla Jhā, Nityānanda Miśra, Vidhubhūṣaṇa Sen (*Vaidya*) Mm. Citradhara Miśra, Mm. Kṛṣṇasiṁha Ṭhākura, Mm. Parameśvara Jhā, Mm. Mukunda Jhā Bakshī, Mm. Gaṅgānātha Jhā and others received patronage from him: He also established *catuṣpāṭhīs* at numerous places and gave generous help to other such institutions in Mithilā.

Other celebrated scholars of the age include Mm. Jayadeva Miśra, Nirśana Miśra (*Vaiyakāraṇa*), Viśvanātha Ṭhakura (*Vaidika*), Śaśinātha Jhā (*Naiyāyika*), Dīnbandhu Miśra (*Vaiyākaraṇa*), Dayānātha

23. Thakur; op. cit., pp. 375-82.

Jhā (Jyotiṣī), Trilokanātha Miśra, Mm. Umeśa Miśra and others, some of whom are still alive.[24]

II

Thus, we find that Mithilā has been a land dedicated to learning from the Vedic times to the present day. The glorious chain of traditional scholarship was here still unbroken. "Never was Mithilā barren of intellectual luminaries, and cultivation of learning was never neglected here...Infact, it came to be regarded as the only honourable profession for a Brāhmaṇa to pursue if he had to retain his position in the society, to neglect which would entail, a loss of social status, but to excel in which would raise him and his family in the estimation of society."[25] The profession was so zealously and vigorously taken up, cultivated and developed that in the fifteenth century Mithilā under the learned Brāhmaṇas became the centre of Sanskrit learning in Eastern India, and "in the sixteenth century Mithilā emerges as the acknowledged head, both secular and religious, of all tbe regions to the north of the river Sarayū."[26] It would. therefore, he no exaggeration to say that this was realy the golden age of Maithila scholarship.

From all accounts it is clear that learning was then cultivated as a part of the Brāhmaṇa's duty and not as a means to an end as now. Wealth and riches had then no place in the social order and was considered of no consequence whatsoever in estimating the social status of a Brāhmaṇa.[27] Indeed, the same traditional dignity of contented poverty was brought to the forefront once again and emphasised with new zeal. "The ideal of perfection among the Maithila Brāhmaṇas......has been Mm. Bhavanātha Miśra of Sarisab (a village in Darbhanga) who is reputed to have never accepted even a gift, much less asked for it, as a mark of respect for which he came to he known as *Ayācī* by which name he is remembered with reverence by posterity".[28]

Such unique instances of this ideal of perfection were, however, few and far between. They were also persons with varying degrees of contentment, but most of the high class Paṇḍitas and Brāhmaṇas had

24. For a descriptive account of the Sanskrit writers of the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth centuries, and their works, see Singh, History of Tirhut, pp. 108-88; Das, Mithila-darpana, pp. 148-210.
25. Sukti-muktāvali (SM.), ed. R. Jha, Intro. 31.
26. Mithilā Manuscripts, Vol. I, Intro. viii.
27. SM. Intro. 32.
28. Ibid.

undoubtedly an attraction for material prosperity. How to use riches in a right way has been thoroughly discussed by Harihara in his *Sūkti-muktāvalī* wherein he has cited the example of Vaṭeśvara, the maternal grandfather of Ayācī and "one of the highest among the Maithila Brāhmaṇas who was renowned not only for his learning but riches also".[29]

Of the six professions[30] approved for a Brāhmaṇa, *dāna* or gift became very popular in post-Harisiṁhadeva Mithilā as *yajñas* had been in pre-Buddhist India. Numerous treatises dealing with this subject clearly suggest that *dāna* was the main source of income for all the Brāhmaṇas and "the only means of acquiring riches for the more conscientious and orthodox among them".[31] This attraction for acquiring wealth through *dāna* served as a great impetus to the moving bands of scholars. Stay-at-home scholars could not, and did not, receive such gifts, though sometimes the more renowned among them were recipients of such gifts, even at their homes. In earlier times, scholars had not to worry about their worldly existence as they were generously patronised by rulers and nobles, but with the gradual disappearance of the ruling dynasties and aristocracies, the traditional patronage of learning and art also recived a serious set-back, the problem of bread soon became more and more acute, and the age-old ideals of perfection came to be rudely thrown in to oblivion. It is against economic background that we have to take in to accounts the new trends and currents in the field of traditional scholarship.

Thus, the growing socio-economic problem of keeping body and soul together forced our unwilling scholars to move about in search of new patrons. In course or time, it became a practice with the Maithila Paṇḍitas to move about atleast once a year and return home with riches sufficient to leave them free to devote themselves to the cultivation of learning throughout the year.[32] There was again another class of Paṇḍitas who were not satisfied with whatever they got to sustain themselves. They wanted more riches, and this lust for wealth made such ambitious Paṇḍitas stay out longer and go farther in search of liberal patrons who could satisfy their high ambitions. Actuated by this motive and stirred on by the lure of vast riches the Maithila scholars undertook perilious journeys to distant lands to find out liberal patrons, if any, of their liking. Indeed, the reputation of these scholars had far spread beyond the geogra-

29. Ibid. XII. 25, Intro. 32.
30. Ibid. Intro. 33.
31. Ibid. Intro. 34.
32. Ibid.

phical boundaries of their country. The great Śaṁkara Miśra claims[33] that his celebrated father Ayācī Bhavanātha, noted above, had a band of scholar-pupils who were spread all over Āryāvarta from one sea to the other, trading in the wares of knowledge".[34] Endowed with sparkling brilliance and wit, euridite learning and versatility rnd exemplary character and unmatching integrity these shining bands of scholars commanded all respect whereever they happened to go. Riches glowed in to their coffers like water. Princes and chieftains accorded them unique distingction. People hailed them as their *gurus* and saviours. Thus laden with immense riches and unique honour most of these scholars came back home. They received enongh wealth to last them through their lives. Besides, they also received grants of lands which their descendants still enjoy. But, some of these scholars left their homes for good and settled down permanently in those far-off regions. In other words, these Maithila Brāhmaṇa scholars established their "colonies" (if we may be permitted to use the term vaguely) all over India. Their descendants are still found in Bengal, Assam, the Central Provinces (Madhya Pradeśa), Rajputana, Kashmir, Uttara Pradeśa, Nepal, and many other place. "If a history of these colonies is compiled, it will be found that each one of them was founded by some adventurous and ambitious Paṇḍita who could please some prince and thus receive from him a lavish gift, perhaps the very *guru-ship* of the royal family, content with which he gave up all ideas of returning home and settled down there".[35]

We give below a few typical instances to illustrate the glorious exploits of these scholars. The renowned Govinda Ṭhākura, author of the celebrated *Kāvya-pradīpa* had as his patron one Bhavānanda Rāya, who has been identified with the founder of the Krishnanagar Rāj of West Bengal, by some scholars.[36] The descendants of the eldest son of this Govinda Ṭhākura are settled in the district of Dinajpur in Bengal and are still in a flouring state. As with the Maithila Brāhmaṇas of Dinajpur, so with the Maithila Brāhmaṇas of the district of Malda (West Bengal). We have another instance of Kavirāja Bhānudatta, author of *Rasamañjarī* and the great grand-son of Ayācī Bhavanātha. He toured extensively in Central India, attended the courts of, and eulogised, Rājā Saṁgrāma Shāh of Garh Mandla ; the Baghela prince Vīrabhāna of Bandogarh, the then capital of the State now known as Rewa ; King Nizam Shah of

33. Cf. his comical drama Gauri-digambara-prahasana
34. Ibid; SM. Intro. 35
35. Ibid. Intro. 35.
36. Some scholars, however, doubt this identification.

Ahmednagar, and king Sher Shah.[37] Gaṅgānanda, popularly known as *Kavīndra*, was the son of the daughter of Kavirāja Bhānudatta's son, who in his search for wealth went as far as Bikaner and composed a work, called *Karṇabhūṣaṇa* after the name of his patron, king Karṇa of Bikaner. The celebrated Mm. Gokulanātha Upādhyāya, along with his brother Mm. Jagannātha, secured patronage of king Fateh Shah of Garhwal.[38]

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the famous Mm. Bhavānīnātha, popularly known to the posterity as Sacala Miśra, the great Jurist, went to Poona to the court of the Peshwā Mādhava Rāo Nārāyaṇa. From him he received the grant of two villages in the district of Jubbulpore (Jabbalpur) which are still in possession of his descendants. Moreover, he is also reputed to have won along with this grant "the high honour of having his *Pālkī* carried by the Peshwā on his own shoulder, an honour which was reserved for the very select Paṇḍitas, which was very rarely bestowed."[39]

Another notable figure of the time was Kṛṣṇadatta Maithila, a well known scholar and poet. He hailed from one of the respectable families of Mithilā. We have very little information about him as in the case of other reputed scholars of the past. He was the celebrated author of *Purañjana-carita* and *Kubalayāśvayiannāmanāṭakam* (1783 A. D.). Both these works show that he was a reputed author of the eighteenth century. Moreover, he was endowed with the genius of writing allegorical drama and his scintillating style "reminds one of Kālidāsa, Bāṇa, Kṛṣṇamiśra and Jayadeva."[40] There is, thus, no doubt that Kṛṣṇadatta Maithila had superb scholarly qualities. His reputation had spread far and wide and his genius had attracted the notice of Devaji Puruṣottama, the Prime-Minister of the Bhonslas of Nagpur who was probably his patron.[41]

But, the most notable example is that of Mm. Maheśa Ṭhākura, the founder of the Darbhanga Raj. His elder brother Mm. Dāmodara Ṭhākura was the *purohita* of king Saṁgrāma Shāh of Garh Mandla, and his descendants were settled in the city of Māhiṣmatī for several generations—a fact recorded by one of his descendants, Mm. Premanidhi in his *Dharmādharma-prabodhinī*. Mm. Maheśa himself secured the Rāj of

37. SM., Intro. 36.
38. Ibid.
39. Quoted, Ibid, Intro. 36.
40. Vide—R. K. Choudhary's paper, "Krishnadatta Maithila and his works" in JBRS, XLII. p. 246.
41. Ibid. p. 246, and for other details, pp. 241-48.

Tirhut from Emperor Akbar by virtue of his vast learning and euridite scholarship. No other instance is available in India where learning has so signally been rewarded, where a Paṇḍita won by dint of his scholarship what others win by the prowess of their arms. "It is indeed to the credit of the holy land of Mithilā, where *Bhūdevas* have been *Bhūpālas* for more than six hundred years to have shown to the world that cultivation of learning can bear fruits in peace as sweet and everlasting as any war can win with all its attending inhumanities."[42]

We have yet another instance of such an exemplary feat during the reign of Shahjahan by two brilliant sons of Mithilā who displayed remarkable intellectual powers. According to the contemporary authorities, on the 5th of Safar, year II, Asaf Khan, the then governor of Bihar, presented two Brāhmaṇas of Tirhut (Mithilā) before the Emperor. Both of them claimed the power to not only quote word for word, and in the same arrangement, the ten fresh lines of "Hindi" (Sanskrit) poems, composed by ten poets, without having heard them even once before, but also to compose off-hand similar lines and in similar metres and rhymes, so as to constitute replies thereto. When His Majesty made them undergo the crucial test more than once and found their claim to be justified by facts, he granted them each a robe of honour and a cash reward of Rs. 1,000 and permitted them to leave for their home. The author of *Amal-i-Saleh*, however, tells us that they were also granted two villages in Tirhut to which they belonged.[43] According to a Maithila scholar,[44] Raghudeva Miśra, a Maithila Paṇḍita composed a *Virudāvalī* in praise of Emperor Shah Jahan. He belonged to the Hariamba family of the Maithila Śrotriya Brāhmaṇas. His name also finds mention in the Maithila *Pañjī* and bears an extremely rare prerogative, *Śrutidhara* (one whose memory is such that whatever is heard but once is retained). The *Pañjī* further informs us that this Raghudeva had an elder brother, Harideva Miśra who was also a *Śrutidhara* and *abilamba araswatī* (quick to learn). These epithets and prerogatives leave no doubt that these "two Brāhmaṇas from Tirhut" were none other than the two scholar-brothers of the Hariamba family—a fact which is also further supported by current local traditions.[45] Moreover, they were Rājā Acyuta Ṭhākura's only daughter's sons as recorded in the Pañjī.

42. SM., Intro. pp. 36-37.
43. Cf. S. H. Askari's paper in PIHC,1944, p, 351 fn. 13.
44. Cf. Tantranath Jha's paper In JBU, vol. I, 1956, p. 79.
45. For other details, see Ibid, pp. 79-80.

Rājā Acyuta Ṭhākura himself was the second son of Mm. Maheśa Ṭhākura.

Harihara in his *Sūkti-muktāvalī* has graphically depicted the state of Sanskrit education and the society during this period. Indeed, he composed this unique work for the guidance of ambitious and adventurous Paṇḍitas. The search for a liberal patron must have been a great problem facing the Paṇḍitas in those days, as does unemployment the graduates now-a-days. Rich men in society took the responsibility for the maintenance of learned men, and thousands of scholars thus made their living on their donations and charity. Maintained and patronised by, and nourished under their munificence Maithila scholars threw themselves heart and soul to the exclusive cultivation of learning which reached its zenith during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries "The brightest product of the age, the one indeed in whom the entire spirit of the age was symbolised, was the great Mm. Mahārāja Maheśa Ṭhākura."[46]

It is thus clear that wealth was no longer despised by the traditional scholars : on the other hand, it came to be eagerly cherished by them. The puritanic indifference with which wealth was formerly looked down upon, was now giving place to riches which is innate in man. In the second and last chapters of his work, Harihara has cited a few details about the lives of certain distinguished *Maithilas* who must have been important personalities of the day. There was one Rāmeśvara[47] who has been identified with Mm. Harihara's maternal grand-father. Vaṭeśvara[48] was another distinguished scholar who was the maternal grandfather of Ayācī Bhavanātha Miśra. Mahādeva Ṭhākura[49] was probably the eldest brother of Mm. Mahārāja Maheśa Ṭhākura. Like his three younger brothers he was also a *Mahāmahopādhyāya* and was popularly known as Thegha Ṭhākura. He left home with the vow that he would return "only with a lac of rupees", but did not return at all probably because his "vow was never fulfilled."[50] Harinātha likewise may have been the famous author of *Smṛti-sāra*, but we can not be very certain about it, as with other names. Nevertheless, petty though these details are and the names sometimes unidentified they have "an historical

46. SM., Intro. 37.
47. SM., II, 22.
48. Ibid. XII. 24.
49. Ibid. XII. 6.
0. Ibid. Intro. 39.

interest which may throw light on many a dark corner of Mithilā's unexplored history."[51]

III

Even to this day Mithilā has been able to preserve her interest in, and love of, the traditional scholarship. *Tols* or *Catuṣpāṭhīs* (popularly called *Caupāḍis*) are still spread all over the land where Paṇḍitas impart education on the old lines. Hundreds of palm-leaf *Mss.* and paper-*Mss.* are read and commented upon even in these days of brisk printing. The marks of this aspect of Maithila culture are found in in various things. Most of the place-names in Mithilā are commemorative of the particular branch of learning that has been perfected or specialised at those particular places—*eg.* Yajuāra (seat of Yajurveda), Rigā (seat of Ṛgveda), Atharī (seat of Atharvaveda), Mau-behaṭa (seat of *Mādhyandinī Śākhā*), Kuthumā (seat of *Kauthumī Śākhā*), Sakarī (seat of *Sakkārī Śākhā* ?), Bhaṭṭasimari and Bhaṭṭapura (seat of Bhaṭṭa school of Mīmāṁsā) etc. Names and even sur-names of men, such as Upādhyāya or Jhā as common surname and Paṇḍita, the surname of potters[52] are also indicative of the same tradition.[53]

Most of the customs and practices of Mithilā are also remnants of this feature. For instance, a peculiar custom mentioned in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*[54] is still observed in Mithilā in its original form. On the day after the *Sukharātri* festival (corresponding to the *Divālī* festival) a pig is tied to a post or tree outside the village where all domestic animals, such as the cows, the buffaloes and the bullocks are brought by every farmer. Then these animals are given a chance to play with the pig, strike it with their horns and, it is generally believed, the more the pig cries, the better are the fruits and harvests of the people.

Similarly there are several customs and usages which show that the roots of Brāhmaṇical culture are deeply engrained in Mithilā.[55] We briefly describe below one such Maithila game where principles of philosophy are used for dialogue. It is called *Ḍhehālela-choo.* The play begins with a number of boys throwing water on all sides. One of them takes up

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51. Ibid. Intro. p. 39.

52. Cf. कुम्भकारोऽपि यत्र पण्डित: etc.

53. J. K. Mishra, JBRS, XXXIII, pts. i-ii, pp. 46-47. IV; iv, iii. 19.

54. J. K, Mishra, Op. cit. p. 47.

55. Pt. Bhekhnātha Jhā has recently completed his work on this subject after twenty years of research, which is entitled, "Vyavahāra-Vijñāna".

some water in his hand and queries : "What is now in my hand ?" "Water" he is told. Then comes a second boy who also asks : "what is now in my hand ?" The answer given is "an egg." Another boy is made to ask : "what hatched this egg ?" and he is told : "such and such boy (hatched it). Then follows the query : "who will destroy it ?" and the answer is : "such and such a boy (will destroy it)." Thereupon asks the original questioner : "who kneads it ?", and then they all throw water on any one of the boys saying : "so and so (kneads it)", and they will not let him rest till the latter accepts defeat. It is suggested that the dialogue refers metaphorically to the first creation of Brahmā, *viz.*, water. Then it describes the Brahmāṇḍa which can be destroyed by Śiva, the Great Destroyer at the time of ***Pralaya*** (the Great Deluge) and lastly it describes the knocks and kicks (*ḍhehā*) which a *Jīva* (Being) receives in this world, and then he realises his defeat and begins to strive for *mukti*. Such is also the case with śatagharā, *dolāvātī* and other sports and pastimes in Mithilā, based on some philosophical concept or other.

The cumulative effect of this extra-ordinary devotion to the traditional learning has been on the whole very fruitful in keeping the lights of scholarship and culture burning throughout the ages. Nevertheless, it must be said that it has also been responsible for the excessive orthodoxy and rigid conservativeness that is yet found in Mithilā. They viewed everything that ran counter to it with great suspicion. The result was that when all the parts of the country were giving lease to new life to their languages and literatures by unbibing new influences with the study of western languages and literature, Maithilas remained comparatively static for a longer time.

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